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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000588

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DEPT FOR U/S BURNS, AF A/S NEWMAN/DAS WOODS; OVP FOR
NULAND; NSC FOR ABRAMS, COURVILLE

DEPARTMENT PASS EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE

E.O. 12958: DECL: (04-16-15)

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ZI](#) [MDC](#)

SUBJECT: MDC Post-Election Plans Taking Form

Classified by CDA Eric Schultz, reasons 1.5 (b) (d)

Ref: (A) Harare 548 and previous

Summary

1. In an April 14 meeting with the Ambassador, MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai laid out in more detail his party's plans for challenging the GOZ in the wake of a third successive stolen election. Tsvangirai said Mugabe would never leave power by democratic means. The Zimbabwean people would have to force him from office through a campaign of civil resistance. The MDC was reaching out to civil society NGOs to create an alliance to pursue this approach. He hoped to mobilize this alliance in particular to oppose Mugabe's expected constitutional reforms proposals.

2. (C) Tsvangirai said the model for the campaign would be the recent events in Gokwe South, where MDC activists had stood up to ZANU-PF thugs and the police, forcing them to back down. The MDC would need to train activists down to the village level to make this work. The party also had to improve its communications, to spread the word about successful acts of resistance. It also had to do a much better job of getting its supporters, especially young people, to register and vote. The Ambassador said this was an area with which we could help through NGOs. Externally, Tsvangirai said the MDC needed to broaden its support in

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Africa and that he was also considering a trip to Ukraine to highlight the similarities between Zimbabwe today and Ukraine a year ago. End Summary.

(Re) Building an Alliance

2. (C) The Ambassador told Tsvangirai that he was traveling back to Washington for consultations on U.S. policy toward Zimbabwe following the March 31 parliamentary elections. In that regard, he had wanted to hear first hand what progress the MDC had made in firming up its post-election plans. Tsvangirai said the party's plan was to confront Mugabe at every turn. Mugabe was not a democrat and he would never give up power through an election. He would have to be driven from office. Critical to the success of this approach was to strengthen the MDC alliance with civil society, including the labor union, ZCTU. The party and its allies had to be seen to be doing something or apathy and cynicism would grow among the populace.

3. (C) The Ambassador noted that many in civil society had expressed unhappiness with the MDC for not having reached out and listened to them. Tsvangirai acknowledged the problem and said the party would work to be more inclusive. The democratic opposition needed to work together in harmony, with no dissenting voices, for their common objective. The broad alliance would mobilize in particular around the question of constitutional reform, and would seek to recreate the National Constitutional Assembly's earlier success in stoking public opposition to Mugabe's proposed changes. Tsvangirai added that several of the civil society leaders had political ambitions themselves, and the MDC would work to give those ambitions space.

4. (C) The Ambassador asked about ZCTU's role. Tsvangirai said it was the urban base of the party and that the MDC needed to reach out to them more effectively. He dismissed government attempts to remove the current leadership, noting they had tried before without success.

Planning Civil Resistance

5. (C) Tsvangirai said in the next six months the party and its allies would focus on building momentum. The first step was that all of the party's candidates would return to

their home constituencies to hold rallies to thank their supporters. The message of these rallies would be that the MDC had won but that Mugabe and ZANU-PF has stolen a third election. The party was also planning actions around the April 18 Independence Day celebrations and May Day. For the former, Tsvangirai said MDC activists would infiltrate the crowd at the national sports stadium and seek to embarrass Mugabe, possibly by walking out en masse while flashing their party's open-palmed symbol or by chanting "change" in Shona. The Ambassador observed that publicizing such actions was critical to their success. Tsvangirai agreed and said the MDC had plans to videotape

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the event.

16. (C) Tsvangirai said the party also recognized the need to do more to overcome rural fear and intimidation. He acknowledged that they had not done enough to protect their rural adherents during the election. In many rural constituencies, traditional leaders (i.e. tribal chiefs) had called their villages together the night before the election and had pressured people to vote ZANU-PF. One of the regime's most effective tactics had been threatening to deny food assistance to MDC supporters. The MDC had to break the back of this intimidation and would do so at its nexus with the population - food distribution centers.

17. (C) Tsvangirai said the model for this approach would be what had happened this week in Gokwe South, a constituency in the Midlands province that the MDC believed had been stolen. There had been great anger among the local population at the theft. ZANU-PF had reverted to form and sought to impose its will by punishing MDC supporters. The night after the election the home of a prominent MDC activist had been burned down. 2000 MDC activists gathered at the site to prevent further attacks. Three truckloads of riot police arrived to disperse the crowd. However, the activists refused to disperse and faced down the police. The next day, 200 of the activists appeared at the food distribution center and refused to let the agents of the Grain Marketing Board discriminate against MDC supporters. They had told the agents either everyone gets food or the "birds will get it." The GMB agents had also backed down.

18. (C) Tsvangirai said the MDC planned to do the same throughout the country. He acknowledged that the GOZ would eventually get wise to these tactics and would try to crack down hard somewhere. In that event, the party had to be prepared to have activists spring up at other locations around the country and force the regime to spread itself too thin for effective repression. They were assisted in that regard by the fact that the food shortages were countrywide. One of the keys to the success of this plan would be to train activists through out the country and build the party structure down to the village level. Another was to spread the word of successful civil resistance actions through word of mouth, as it was doing now with respect to the events in Gokwe South, and to encourage that they be emulated elsewhere. In that regard, he acknowledged that the party's communications department had failed abysmally after the election and needed dramatic improvement.

Registering Voters

19. (C) Tsvangirai acknowledged that the party had a lot of work to do to correct weaknesses in advance of future elections. In addition to building party structures down to the village level and training cadre, another key was voter registration. The MDC had not done nearly enough to register its core supporters, especially young voters. More than twenty percent of young voters had not bothered to register. That needed to be addressed before rural council elections in 2006 and urban council elections in 2007. Tsvangirai noted that women over forty formed one of ZANU-PF's most loyal sources of support. The MDC had to try to reach out to them but more importantly it had to reach out to women under the age of forty, who should be their supporters, and get them to register and vote.

Engaging Diplomatically

10. (C) Tsvangirai said the MDC was also planning a series of external steps to increase the pressure on the regime. The party needed to do more to establish its independence from the U.S. and the UK. To that end, the main thrust had to be in Africa, where the party needed to build opposition to Mugabe and his policies. However, Tsvangirai said he was also thinking of making a trip to Ukraine to meet President Yushchenko to stress the point that Zimbabwe was in the same place Ukraine had been before the Orange Revolution.

Comment

11. (C) Throughout the meeting, Tsvangirai referred to a written memo he had brought with him. The MDC's leadership has clearly been thinking a lot about next steps and it is heartening that their ideas are taking concrete shape. Moreover, we would agree that what happened in Gokwe South is the right model to follow. While it would be nice to see them make a splash at the national stadium on Monday, it is really in the rural areas that the MDC needs to take action and make progress. In that regard, while we had heard bits and pieces about what had occurred in Gokwe South, we had no idea the extent of MDC activism, nor we suspect did anyone else. The MDC's inability to get its message out remains a debilitating weakness, one that it has to overcome almost immediately if its civil resistance campaign is to catch fire and spread nationally.

12. (C) The visit to Kiev strikes us a very creative idea and one we enthusiastically endorse. It could be particularly useful to have President Yuschenko and Georgian President Sakashvili meet with Tsvangirai.

Schultz